Volume 71, Number 6, 2012/2013

# MUNICIPAL

## LIQUOR STORE

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MINNESOTA BEVERAGE ASSOCIATION www.municipalbev.com



# How a Simple Legislative Change Can Lead to Unexpected Results

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## MUNICIPAL **LIQUOR STORE**

Volume 71, Number 6, 2012 / 2013

Official publication of the Minnesota Municipal Beverage Association. Published six times annually: September/October, November/December, January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August. For advertising and editorial inquiry conact Paul Kaspszak, Editor, Box 32966, Fridley, MN 55432. Phone 763-572-0222 or 866-938-3925. Advertising rates available upon request. Change of address: List both old and new address.

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## ON THE COVER

In the 2012 Minnesota Legislative Session the following was added to the list of items allowed to be sold by an exclusive liquor store (off sale):

340A.412 Subd. 14 (14) clothing marked with the specific name, brand, or identifying logo of the exclusive liquor store, and bearing no other name, brand, or identifying logo.

Your executive director believes the spirit of the law has been violated by including quotes and phrases on the clothing and selling items such as baby bibs, (pictured on the cover) men's boxers and women's hot shorts.

However, he agrees with Alcohol and Gambling Enforcement that, in short, based on the plain language of the statute, these items would not appear to be violation.

This is another example of how a simple legislative change can lead to unexpected results.



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## MMBA President's Message



Lara Smetana *President* 

SPACE.....sales floor, storage, cooler. Do you have enough? Maybe you have too much? What can you do to maximize the space you have for your business?

I am sure we all can relate to the space issue. I have a store that is long and skinny and we are busting at the seams. An expansion would fix our need for space but that is not an option at this time so I need to deal with what I have and make it work to the best of my ability. As managers we are expected to work within the space we are given and make decisions that will positively affect our profit margins.

In the most recent years we have seen an increase in wine and liquor sales. Because of that trend, it is important for me to stay on top of what we have for a selection. It is important to know what your top sellers are and get rid of the "dogs".

Really think about the new products that are flooding the market and make the choices that best fit your market. What sells somewhere else may not sell in your store. You need to balance the space you dedicate to those products that are the staples and those that are new.

I was recently in a store that was very small. It is located in a northern community that sees tourist as well as the local customer. The manager chose to bring in a variety of new, unheard of products, display them on the floor and sell them at a discounted price to attract an impulse or add on sale. The thought is to persuade the customer to purchase

something more than what they came in to buy because it looks like a really good deal; while at the same time making sure to carry the staple beers for her "local" customers

When I make purchasing decisions, I purchase bulk quantities of the staple products so that we may reap the benefits of the free goods or discounted price. I do not always run a feature or lower the price. The ability to sell the free goods at full value adds dollars to the bottom line. When bringing in new products, I ask for the smallest deal or just do case one.

There are two reasons why I do that: first, I do not want to get stuck with a bunch of something that may not sell and second I may not have the floor space for a display or the storage space to house it in the back room.

With a smaller store, making sure it is clean and easy to shop is very important. Do not use your sales floor for storage. It is not pleasing to the customer when you have stacks of stuff everywhere. It also is confusing to the customer when you use the bottom shelf on your sales floor for overstock bottles.

If you are fortunate to have a large store with lots of sales floor, storage and cooler space, make sure you are maximizing that as well.

Have you ever heard the saying "A restaurant with ten tables and nine of them have customers is more inviting than a restaurant with twenty

tables and only nine of them are filled."

The thought behind that is you want a balance. It is important to look busy or in our case, look like you have a good selection to offer. You could have the largest, most beautiful store around, but if you have empty shelves or open spaces the customer may assume you don't have a good s election or competitive pricing. They may be intimidated by the space and be uncomfortable shopping there.

You must also look at how your space impacts your employees. Is it easy to see and help your customers? Are the displays too big, cases in the storage area stacked too high? Do you have enough on staff to work the floor and take care of the stocking needs? It is important to walk your store and look around as a customer would as well as an employee. Things you can ask yourself while touring your own store: Does the flow of the products make sense? Is it easy to find what I am looking for? Is it safe for both my customers and my staff? Is my store clean and organize? Or cluttered and messy? Would I want to shop here again?

So, I leave you with this. Take a look at the space that you have and think about how you can make the best of what you have. Keep in mind the customers, your employees, your product selection, and making a positive impact on the bottom line. It is a fine balance, but with some strategic planning you can make any space work.

When we explain what we're trying to achieve instead of just making demands or delegating tasks, others are more likely to contribute ideas.





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## **Lonsdale Liquor Has a Great 2012**

By KAITLYN WALSH, Lonsdale Area New-Review

Lonsdale Liquor recently fulfilled the city's hope that its profits could help carry the financial burden on taxpayers.

The city's park fund recently received \$10,000 of the municipal liquor store's profits after its most profitable year yet, according to store manager Lynette Moe.

"We started slow and struggled up until about two years ago," Moe said. "2012 is the best year we've had. The more I can contribute, the less taxes are."

In addition, the city-owned and -managed store doubled its monthly payment to the sewer fund, from which the city borrowed \$710,000 in order to build and open the store in 2007. The Lonsdale City Council approved the transfers and changes to the store's contributions at its Jan. 10 meeting.

With the store's payment of \$10,800 that the council unanimously voted to approve — upping the total contributed to the fund in 2012 to \$100,000 — the total balance due is \$400,000. It's expected to be paid off in about 10 and a half years with the increase of the monthly transfer to the sewer fund from \$1,600 per month to \$3,200 per month.

When that debt is paid, all of the store's profits can help fund future city projects and store improvements, if needed, Moe said Tuesday.

Any money the store contributes would alleviate some of the burden on taxpayers, Moe said.

A lot of small details can influence profits, said Council Member Joe Daleiden, who serves on the liquor store committee that made recommendations to the council on the recent changes and contributions.

"You still have to remain positive on your numbers in order to do this," Daleiden said. "The people in our town love our parks and trails system and we've been sticking a lot of money into it."

The committee — that includes Moe, Council Member Kevin Kodada and assistant manager Carolyn Korba — looked at switching credit card companies to one with cheaper credit and debit card use charges to save a potential minimum of \$5,000, Daleiden said.

"Thanks to everybody that's buying," Daleiden said. "Know that the money you're spending for something you want like this goes back to your community."

And knowing Lonsdale and what its residents want, while keeping customer service at its best, affect how the store does, Moe said.

Moe said she has gotten a handle on which products to carry and how much, which has improved turnover.

"We're ordering it, and then selling it out," Moe said. "There's a flow."

The store offers special discounts, including deals for seniors on Wednesdays and when customers buy in bulk, which Moe said helps the store compete with out-of-town competitors.

"I'm hoping this year will be just as good as 2012," she said.

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# <u>Community Voices: The Fall & Rise of Savage's Liquor Stores</u>

BY JOE JULIUS Savage Pacer

Question: What does the city of Savage have that our neighbors in Prior Lake, Burnsville and Shakopee don't? (No, it's not the sports dome, that's fodder for another time).

Give Up? Savage is one of the few cities south of the river that owns and operates its own liquor stores. That's right, no "off sale" liquor can be sold within Savage city limits unless it's sold by the city.

But why, you may ask. How did we get there?

A history lesson: After Prohibition was repealed, numerous cities, and some states, deemed that they could better "control" the drinking of their citizens if liquor could only be sold though government-owned outlets. A side benefit was the profits the government would receive from the sales.

Fast forward to 2013. Over the years many cities decided that they could no longer efficiently operate their own

liquor stores. They decided they would be better off receiving the tax revenue from privately owned operations or when the city was incorporated, they simply chose not to get into the liquor business.

Savage was one of the cities that decided to stay in the liquor business, and own and operate its own stores. It appeared to be a wise decision by the city fathers (and mothers). Profits from the liquor operations were a boon to a rapidly growing community. The McColl Pond Environmental Learning Center and Savage Library were two projects funded, in part, by liquor store profits.

Things were joyous for the city until we began to be surrounded by the regional and national liquor stores that opened in our sister cities. Profits plunged 80 percent. The stores had a bloated expense structure and were heavy with non-current inventory. I, for one, advocated for closure and sale of the stores. Hey, I reasoned, some money is better than none.

Then a funny thing happened. The city administration and council decided to aggressively address the problem of declining sales and profits. They commissioned studies, did surveys, cut expenses and hired a new, savvy liquor store manager. The result was an immediate return to profitability and the transfer of approximately \$175,000 to the city's general fund. Hey, I for one applaud any action that will reduce my taxes!

So, job well done Ms. Mayor, Barry and City Council! We should all be excited to see the new remodeling and signing of the MarketPlace store this year. We're not out of the woods yet, but the positive steps taken, I believe, will assure success. I know my wife is planning on buying all her wine at the Savage liquor stores. That should increase business dramatically.

Joe Julius is one of several people in the Savage community who write for Community Voices - a column appearing weekly in the opinion and commentary section of the Savage Pacer newspaper.

## **On-Sale Container Size**

The MMBA received the following note from a member combination facility:

I thought there was a limitation that you could only use 750 ml and liter bottles in the on sale. A salesman stated that you can use a 1.75 behind the bar? Do you know what the rule is on this? Just wondering as I have a certain type of Gin remaining that isn't moving in the off sale that I thought we could use for bar pour

in the on sale, but we only have 1.75 bottles of it.

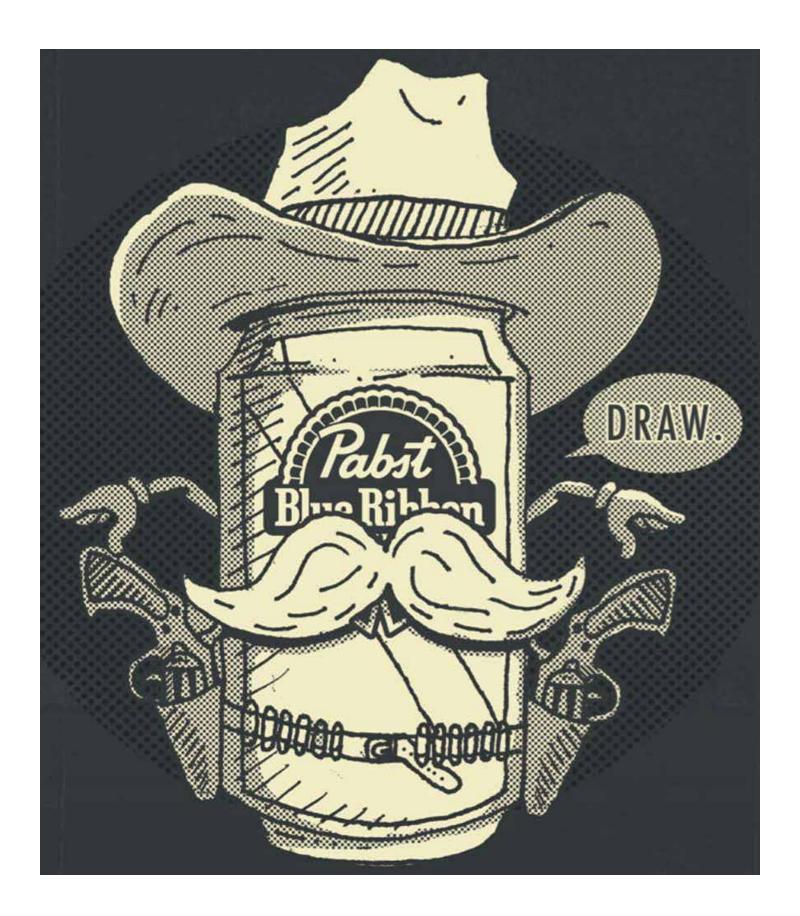
According to Minnesota
Administrative Rules:

7515.0560 ON-SALE DEALERS.

Subpart 1. Containers; minimum quantities; minimum proof of distilled spirits.

No on-sale dealer shall purchase or possess distilled spirits in

containers less than one-fifth gallon or its metric equivalent. Containers of less than one-fifth of a gallon, or its metric equivalent, shall be subject to confiscation, provided miniatures containing not more than two ounces, or their metric equivalent, may be purchased for dispensing devices, the use of which has been specifically approved by the commissioner. In addition, no on-sale dealer shall purchase distilled spirits other than cordials, liqueurs, or specialty items which are less than 80 proof.



## **Better Pricing, Higher Sales**

Dennis E. Brown Atenga, Inc.

In nearly every industry there are companies offering higher quality. premium products and services. These offerings may be characterized by better performance characteristics. high-fashion design, quality components, better fit and finish, advanced technology, superior logistics and support policies, longer life, superior warranties, or other value drivers that define the character of the company. the products and their conception of how to serve their marketplace. These companies face standard or substandard competitors who charge lower prices and who may cut production corners or offer inferior business processes and services. The premium vendors usually face costs higher than those of the standards, and they attempt to win business at the higher prices they need in order to turn a profit. The customer base is therefore in turmoil, constantly forced to make a decision between superior products and services against those which may not be as good, but offer lower prices.

As America – and the rest of the world – emerges from the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, many of these premium companies are facing new levels of pressure on their pricing. They face customers struggling with their own survival, forced into an "every dollar counts" mentality and more resistant than ever before to paying premium prices.

There are companies that offer superior products and services, and also have the lowest costs. Companies such as Proctor & Gamble, Microsoft, Wal-Mart, Intel, Apple, John Deere, and 3M corporations spring readily to mind. It is interesting to note that these companies rarely dominate their

markets with lower prices. Wal-Mart may be the exception to this observation. Instead, most of these companies charge higher prices and retain the premium as profits. But most companies are not so fortunate. Most companies that offer premium products and services also face higher costs, which makes their ability to profit dependent on their being able to monetize their differences and charge prices higher than their competitors'. These companies are the subject of this paper.

The ability to consistently win premium prices in a competitive market is not an isolated event. It is, instead, the result of a succession of processes, each of which must be executed well in order to succeed. These steps are:

- Market characterization
- Differentiation
- Market definition
- · Product definition
- Market segmentation
- Value clarification
- Optimized Pricing strategy
- Value-oriented sales resources, processes and execution

#### 1. Market characterization

The first step is to recognize the nature of the marketplace you are in. Many executives make the mistake of characterizing price resistance and price competition as evidence their market has become commoditized. This has the effect of excusing poor price performance, but it draws attention away from the steps that need to be taken in order to win premium prices. If one defines a commoditized

market as one where buying decisions are made primarily on price and availability, our experience is that very few markets operate in this fashion. With few exceptions, buyers are willing to pay "more" for quality that generates value for them. Usually, when a market appears commoditized, other factors are at work. If a marketplace is truly commoditized, there are usually niches, segments really, that are willing to pay higher prices for specific attributes, features and services. Even in the most commoditized of markets, there are still successful premium vendors who have been able to provide these additional attributes and charge for them.

#### 2. Differentiation

Pricing power arises from differentiation. The ability to set and hold price is the beneficial result of having identified what buyers are willing to pay for, and providing it. This simple truth often gets lost in the fog of business activity, and executives search in vain for a magic bullet, a price that will "make" people buy. There is no substitute for the hard work of discovering what customers are willing to pay for, messaging it relentlessly, delivering it consistently and earning the right to charge premium prices.

If the first source of difficulty is the fog around buyer motivations, the second is the fact that these purchase drivers are not immutable over time. As referenced in the first paragraph, yesterday's effective differentiators may be duds today. A consistent process for monitoring buyer value drivers will pay enormous dividends in terms of keeping your company "on top" of the market.

#### 3. Market definition

Companies often start out (or launch a product line) with a definition of the marketplace they serve. But as time

(Continued on page 13)

## "BIG AND COMPLEX" AND "ENJOYABLE" ARE NO LONGER MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE.





## BETTER PRICING, HIGHER SALES

marketplace they serve. But as time goes on the boundary of the definition becomes less and less clear, and some find themselves in the situation of selling to "everybody." In practice, selling to "everybody" promotes a culture of giving way on price to win unprofitable business, and price discipline disappears in a whirlpool of falling margins and declining profits. It is an ironclad rule that a policy of selling to "everybody" results in downward pressure on prices, and it is nearly always better to define your market carefully and work relentlessly to serve it better than anyone else.

#### 4. Product definition

Often only the largest of companies can afford the luxury of a professional product management function. This does not mean, however, that the function is not essential. Someone needs to rationalize the offering, organize it into categories that communicate its value to the marketplace, and align the prices with buyers' willingness to pay. A company with a large number of clients, each of whom buys only a little bit, is evidencing defective product management functionality. The products should promote one another and speak to the marketplace a consistent message of value. A well-managed product portfolio is not outside the reach of most companies. At a minimum, companies need a formal framework for organizing and managing the product portfolio, harmonizing the messaging and bridging the gap between engineering, production and marketing to improve price realization. The result is often a new vocabulary, a new level of communication between the departments, and concrete action plans to improve price performance for existing products. Very often, the "low hanging fruit" in the orchard of product definition lies in the identification of ancillary business processes and costs that your company can impact. Often you can, with simple changes in your business practices, reduce your

customers' costs in a meaningful way at little cost to your own organization, enabling delivery of greater value than your competitors' and justifying premium prices.

### 5. Market segmentation

We said in section 3 that selling to "everybody" results in downward pressure on prices. In practice this observation drives an imperative to segment your markets. Identify the discriminators (Location? Gender? Age? Size of company? Industry? Title of the respondent? Role in the Value chain?) that enable meaningful identification of buyers willing to (1) appreciate the differentiators that characterize your company and your offerings; and (2) pay higher prices for them. Segmentation is conceptually straightforward; capture discriminator information about each customer and each prospect, and then align it with profit generation and price realization. Usually 20% of the customers generate 80% of the revenues, but this ratio may not hold in terms of profits. A little analytical work will uncover your ratios and the aforementioned alignment of will show where to focus your time and energy.

#### 6. Optimized pricing strategy

A sales strategy aims to optimize revenues. A pricing strategy aims to optimize profits. It informs the sales strategy, as it gives guidance in terms of what market segments to pursue, and how to manage discounts. But the pricing strategy tells you what prices to charge in what circumstances. Obviously, the strategy will depend on the go-to-market vehicle.

If you go to market through retail channels, the entire value proposition must be conveyed through some kind of advertising, and/or by the package as it sits on the shelf. Secondary activities like training the retail salespeople (if there are any), optimizing the website, managing lists of consumers and engaging with them and the like will help, but the heavy lifting will be carried by the advertising and the package.

If you go to market with your own sales force, you will have much deeper conversations with far fewer individuals. Success comes to the sales force that can target individuals likely to pay for what you're offering, as well as clarify for them why your products and services are worth what you want to charge. The pricing strategy involves goodbetter-best price levels, price imaging, bundles, service options, unbundles, and pricing structures that vary the final price based on the value drivers of the marketplace.

## 7. Value oriented sales resources and processes

In many cases, executives frustrated by their seeming inability to win premium prices find that the culprit can be found in their sales processes. It can be suboptimal sales resources, sales management and direction, sales processes, or sales behavior. Here is a sample of sales resource and process errors we have uncovered and repaired:

Prospecting fails to target optimum market segments, bringing in customers who exert downward pricing pressure, rather than those most likely to pay for your specific differentiators.

- Qualification fails to weed out customers unwilling to pay for the specific elements of value your company delivers.
- Salespeople "pitch" without adequate understanding of prospects' circumstances, needs, wants, value drivers, purchase drivers and price drivers.
- Salespeople find it easier to sell their managers on offering dis counts than to sell customers on paying premium prices.
- Management urges salespeople to "sell high" in the organization, but fails to provide messaging or other resources tailored to C-level concerns.
- Management fails to provide or capture meaningful contact

(Continued on Next Page)

## BETTER PRICING, HIGHER SALES

information from the broad range of the marketplace, relying instead on individuals' limited efforts.

- Management fails to sufficiently engage its marketplace
- Management fails to support value selling, allowing sales to rely on price and discounts to drive business
- Management fails to structure prices to support salespeople's price negotiations

There are two sad facts in these scenarios. First is that few companies engage in an organized fashion with the issue of winning premium pricing. Instead, management spends most of their time dealing with urgent emergencies and internal issues, leaving little time to organize an effort to win pricing. The result is that most companies fail several of these steps, and failing even one of them will cause problems winning premium pricing. The second sad fact is the extent to which even small changes in price performance drive serious changes in profitability. While it is well known that the average American company will see about 11% change in profits for every 1% change in price performance, few companies even bother to calculate how much they are gaining or losing as they make decisions about pricing.

#### 8. Conclusion

In today's economy, the pressures on your prices have never been as severe.

But too many companies end up competing on their prices instead of on their strengths. Their willingness to offer lower prices or higher discounts to win a deal initiates and perpetuates a culture of price competition, eroding margins, and ultimately leads to the erroneous perception that their market is commoditized.

## **Tax on Free Liquor**

An MMBA Member Asked:

If a liquor store owner wants to give a customer a free bottle of wine, is the sales tax calculated on the wholesale cost or another amount? If it is the selling price, can't that number be manipulated?

According to the Minnesota Department of Revenue:

If a liquor store owner gives away a bottle of liquor, then the liquor store owner owes use tax on their cost of the liquor. The liquor store owner would owe the 6.875% state general use tax rate, plus the 2.5% liquor gross receipts use tax rate and any applicable local use taxes. The use tax would be reported when they file their sales and use tax return.

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## **10 Types of Merchandise to Put on Clearance**

By Bob Phibbs, the Retail Doctor

**Shopworn:** Items that visibly show dirt, dust, yellowed packaging or items that have faded in the sun or are just plain OLD.

<u>Seasonal:</u> Items that were only appropriate for the holiday and didn't sell aren't worth storing for next year.

**Loners:** If you only have one left, clear it out. It will only get lost among your newer SKUs.

**Demos:** Items you used to display, demonstrate, or feature in a display that are or have been out of their packaging.

Out of Fashion: Trends that came and went often don't come back for a long time.

**Duplicates:** Multiple lines of the same type of merchandise leave you overbought. Eliminate the slow movers.

<u>Vendor You No Longer</u> <u>Buy From:</u> You won't be reordering, and that money can be reinvested in your better sellers.

Lower 20%: Always cull your lower 20% of SKUs in each of your various categories.

**Too Specific:** Don't hold on to old accessories for an item that was once popular.

Overbought: Mistakes happen. Items you have just too much of should be brought into line with sales.

## Minnesota Pabst Update

Pabst Blue Ribbon had another great year in Minnesota with sales being +7%. That is the 7th Consquetive year that PBR has grown in our great state. Thanks for all your support and we are looking to move PBR to even great heights in 2013.

Nationally the brand grew double digits in 42 states and I know we will move back into that category this year. How can we do that?

First we have great beer. PBR again won the Gold Medal for Best American Lager Style Beer at the Great American Beer Festival in Denver this past Fall. Plus the Pabst Brewing Company and our Brewmaster, Greg Duehs (a St. Paul boy) were named

Best Beer Company and Best Brewmaster respectively at the Festival.

Second – We great promotional tools available to tie in with national marketing but even more importantly we can customize our programs locally to what is important for our market. We have done this consistently in the past (example: PBRbor Day) and need to hear back from MMBA members as to ideas for your stores.

Third- As you know brands are built in the on premise so we will concentrating on getting more distribution and promotions in this area in addition to expanding into more venues such as Target Center (Timberwolves), St. Paul Saints (can't wait for the Lowertown Stadium in 2014-2015), North Star Roller Girls at the Mpls. Convention Center (check their website and if you are in town during a bout date give me a call for tickets) and more in the works.

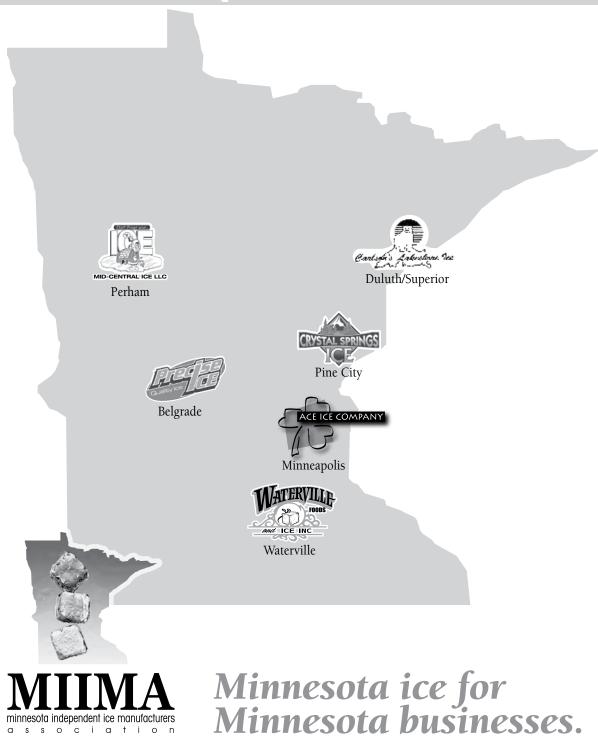
Again thanks to all the MMBA members who have supported PBR over the year and we have just scratched the surface of what is possible. See you at the Spring Conference.

Jeff Van Schoick Pabst Brewing Co. MN Area Sales Manager 612-760-2313

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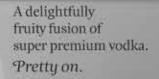
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